



CITY OF HOUSTON

Sylvester Turner

Mayor

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October 13, 2021

The Honorable Chris Paddie
Chair, House Committee on State Affairs
Austin, Texas 78711

The Honorable Bryan Hughes
Chair, Senate Committee on State Affairs
Austin, Texas 78711

RE: House Bill 155 and Senate Bill 51

Dear Chairs Paddie and Hughes,

The City of Houston appreciates the opportunity to offer written testimony against House Bill 155 and Senate Bill 51, which would prohibit public entities and private businesses from requiring employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19. While the City of Houston believes its current employee COVID-19 testing requirements are not subject to the bills' restrictions, the City opposes these two bills.

"Private businesses don't need government running their business."

-Governor Greg Abbott spokesperson Renae Eze quoted in the Texas Tribune on August 25th.

Businesses in Houston and around Texas have struggled during the pandemic with conflicting information coming from various levels of government. Governor Abbott admitted as much in acknowledging Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff's mask policy and its compliance with the Governor's previous executive orders. House Bill 155 and Senate Bill 51 continue to confuse the business community by directly contradicting federal policy. Fortunately, the Texas Legislature has the opportunity to end this confusion by stopping another government preemption from becoming law.

Vaccine mandates are as American as the patriots of George Washington's army and as current as vaccines required for children to attend school in the Fall of 2021. This debate should be about public health and safety, about how we can make vaccination easier and accessible to more Texans, and about how we can end this pandemic.

Seeing businesses protecting their workforce and the people they serve brings hope to seeing the end of this pandemic. However, instead of encouraging public health consciousness, these two bills, taken in the final week of the 3rd called Special Session, would penalize organizations that believe in CDC guidance.

I have publicly said in the past:

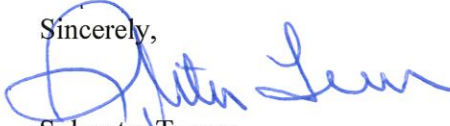
"I cannot stand by and watch employees continue to get sick, and in some cases die, from a disease that we know how to manage. The virus is having an impact on our workforce and the City's ability to provide services directly to the public."

That logic continues today as I oppose these two bills.

The City of Houston, while it has not taken on a vaccinate mandate of its employees, knows that we must protect our residents and prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the workforce. Houston has done its part by requiring employees to test for the virus so that the City can maintain a high level of continuous public service. Employees can exempt out of testing if they provide appropriate documentation.

As has been stated before, we will not make true, meaningful progress in our economic recovery until we end our public health crisis. Fortunately, together, we as Texans, have made some of that progress, but having the state government step in to deny elected leaders and business owners the ability to offer their employees and customers a safe environment will set this recovery back.

Sincerely,



Sylvester Turner
Mayor